

ADVISORY COUNCIL
FOR ADULT
AND CONTINUING
EDUCATION

**CONTINUING EDUCATION:
LOCAL LEARNING CENTRES**

The Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education is established by the Secretary of State for Education and Science with the following remit:

To advise generally on matters relevant to the provision of education for adults in England and Wales, and in particular:

- (a) to promote co-operation between the various bodies in adult education and review current practice, organisation and priorities, with a view to the most effective deployment of available resources; and
- (b) to promote the development of future policies and priorities, with full regard to the concept of education as a process continuing throughout life.

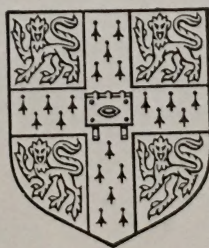


CONTINUING EDUCATION:
LOCAL LEARNING CENTRES

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CHAIRMAN'S PREFACE

In the spring of 1982 the Advisory Council published its major report, *Continuing Education: from policies to practice*, in fulfilment of the second of its main terms of reference. In that report the Council proposed a comprehensive system of continuing education: it made a strong case for a coherent national policy, described the present spread of often disjointed provision, and examined the barriers to adults' access to education, guidance about educational opportunities, alternative routes into education, accessibility of institutions, new modes of learning, financing of institutions and learners, legislation and priorities for future policy and practice.

The Council indicated, when it published that report, that it would develop further its thinking in several of the above areas. One of these was the concept of local centres for continuing education, which is contained in the section of the report on the accessibility of institutions.

This paper examines in more detail the place of 'local learning centres for continuing education' in a comprehensive system of continuing education for adults and describes the desirable characteristics of such centres. It advocates the need for pilot centres as one of the priorities of any scheme of development which might follow on the work of the Advisory Council when its remit expires in October 1983.

The Council is particularly grateful to the small working group of Council members who have produced this paper under the convenorship of Howard Gilbert and the guidance of Naomi Sargant McIntosh (who chaired the committee which produced *Continuing Education: from policies to practice*). Members of the committee and the working group are listed on page 9.

RICHARD HOGGART
Chairman of the Advisory Council

September 1983

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Advisory Council & Committee Membership

BASIS OF LOCAL LEARNING CENTRES

- 1 The Advisory Council's report *Continuing Education: from policies to practice* proposed a network of Local Learning Centres for continuing education (chapter 7, paragraphs 7.8-7.16) and described them as possible 'educational service stations of the future'. The variety and range of their activities is proposed in detail later in this paper. The Council sees them in many different locations, sizes and situations, but fundamentally as places of first resort for those seeking to enter, re-enter or re-train during adult life.
- 2 In chapter 13 of the *Continuing Education* report, dealing with 'Priorities for Action', the Council proposes that plans for a network of Local Learning Centres should be prepared during the next two years and development of the network started within three to five years (paragraph 13.17). The report proposes that the drawing up of plans for this network should be a co-operative exercise involving the DES, the Welsh Office, the local authority associations, LEAs and voluntary organisations; also that the initiative for the establishment of this network should rest with LEAs (paragraphs 7.16 and 13.17).
- 3 The Council also believes that the approach to a full network of Local Learning Centres has to be realistically based, making maximum use of all available resources and bringing voluntary as well as statutory organisations into full partnership. Centres will vary in form and structure according to local circumstances and existing capital resources. Urban and city communities would have several different forms of Centre, each relating at a particular level to the broad hierarchy of needs and offering appropriately diverse programmes. These would include high street drop-in shops, small neighbourhood centres, community centres, public libraries and larger and more complex units possibly based in schools, colleges and workplace learning centres or units set up by the MSC or industry. Rural and semi-rural districts would have a different variety: for example, the village hall, the village school, the neighbourhood community college, the area college of further education or the mobile library might supplement its role.
- 4 Whatever location is used and under whichever auspices Local Learning Centres are established, certain criteria are crucial:
 - (a) approachability and acceptability to adults who may be reluctant to 'return to school';
 - (b) flexible provision that is demand-led and not institutionally focussed;

- (c) a philosophy and an outreach working practice that reaches into, and works in, the community and identifies adult learning needs where people are;
- (d) the facility to plan at different levels within the framework of an area policy.

- 5 Given such a context the Council sees Local Learning Centres being organised by many different sorts of institutional providers and, where circumstances appear practical, arising from local voluntary initiative or sponsorship. Different levels of service would be needed and doubtless an LEA initiating a local structural plan would seek to harmonise proposals, always maximising resources available but ensuring that provision is demand-led (*Continuing Education: from policies to practice*, paragraph 7.10).
- 6 Local Learning Centres is an omnibus term, as the Council fully recognises. However, in its report *Continuing Education: from policies to practice*, the Council's vision is of a variety of Centres offering an educational service at many different levels. At their most simple they may be thought of as places of first enquiry or first resort where adults, returning to education, may seek help in the immediate analysis of their needs. In more complex forms they will provide this service and offer more wide-ranging services for analysis, counselling, and personal programme development. Their purpose, and the key factor in their function (although their link with formal institutions may be a close one; geographically, structurally or otherwise) is to develop educational programmes for students through a system of negotiation and participative planning rather than through the pursuit of set schemes and syllabuses.
- 7 A Local Learning Centre should be open when most of the adult population is out and about: at weekends and during holiday times as well as for a full year. The Council therefore believes a comprehensive service requires a day-by-day, morning, afternoon, evening and weekend programme throughout 50 to 52 weeks of the year, and notes that there are already examples of this type of service. The curriculum should conform to the calendar year, not the academic one; an information and advisory service is essential, and a counselling service too at selected centres. In essence what is needed is an educational 'shop' where people can get information and advice and select a programme to suit their needs: not a college or school at which access and 'purchasing' are possible only if pre-requisite qualifications are supplied.

- 8 Although much of what is needed represents existing best practice, even in the best of these there are certain significant differences between the Council's concept of Local Learning Centres and the best practice; and it is to these differences that this paper is addressed. Moreover, even the best programmes have constraints, ranging from restrictions imposed by collective national agreements that affect the cleaning, maintenance and caretaking of education premises, to those implicit in the limited concept of the academic year which bear no relation to the actual motivation to learn; constraints of this nature must be removed.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 9 According to the size of the particular Centre, its principal characteristics should include as many as possible of the following elements:
- (a) open access for adults, without prior qualification and a specific programme that enables this to be so;
 - (b) courses and opportunities meeting both the vocational and the general educational needs of adults;
 - (c) an information, advisory and (as appropriate) a counselling service at the basic level covering work opportunities and related educational preparation to general cultural opportunities and pursuits (the Centre would be informed about work and leisure; about where to seek jobs, play squash or go to the theatre);
 - (d) study facilities for individuals and groups, organised or self-programmed, with library and other learning resources;
 - (e) a programme of formal classes and, sometimes, a base for informal group activity which would be part of a wider network, for example, that provided by the general adult education service in school and college buildings;
 - (f) a physical setting and atmosphere that is friendly, open and encouraging to the enquirer. Therefore there is likely to be a lounge or common room, a canteen, a creche and playgroup (and arrangements with local groups and childminders), as well as facilities for the elderly and physical handicapped;
 - (g) possibly an accommodation base for a variety of educational agencies, for example, the WEA tutor-organiser, the Open University counsellor (although not necessarily the OU Study Centre), regional or area advisers of voluntary bodies etc. The various providers of accommodation will include universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and further education, centres and institutes of adult education, establishments and locale provided by voluntary bodies, workplace centres and MSC units;
 - (h) flexi-study resources, facilities for distance learning assistance and private study.

LOCATION

- 10 Centres of first enquiry must be in close proximity to areas of activity in the local community: that is 'where things happen'. There will be many different demographical and geographical situations. For convenience of illustration we have adopted a rough grouping below. However, we believe a number of pilot schemes are desirable (see paragraph 19) and in the development of these, and their situation, regard should be had to the greater complexity of the demography.

Cities, large towns and suburban districts will have many different Centres. Some will be sited in shopping precincts, or multi-storey car parks; others of the 'drop-in' variety might occupy a small shop and be near a bus station or beside a laundrette or bingo hall. A 'resource' bus is a useful facility also. It is the nature of the site that is critical: it must be somewhere where large numbers of people go about their daily business. The function of each will relate to an overall local perspective of need.

For small provincial and country towns similar principles apply and every effort should be made to secure a central location. It is often the case with smaller towns that a local college or adult education centre is found in the centre of activity; where this is so the enhancement of their facilities to provide a 'drop-in' service may be advantageous but care is essential. The educational alienation revealed in the Council's survey *Adults: their educational experience and needs* illustrates the need for sensitivity. Once again the nature of the situation is important. A college that is on the periphery of a town would not be suitable as a Local Learning Centre although it may well be part of the wider network.

Rural districts offer a number of problems for the Centre approach. Frequently the only recognised educational service may be that offered by the community school which serves several villages and possibly a small town, but it may not be sufficiently local. What may also be needed is some form of travelling facility providing advice and information; a network counsellor from the district college, community college or adult centre who holds 'surgery' in the village hall, church hall or even the pub. It is here especially that distance learning may have a major role to play.

The Council's recently published study *Post Initial Education in the North West of England: a survey of provision* offers a useful guide to the general location of Centres.

- 11 Adult education establishments that are found in some districts, cities and towns, afford both focus points for Local Learning Centres and supplementary resources of a network kind. The programmes offered in these establishments should cover both vocational and general courses so that they are more broadly representative of popular need. Adults do not differentiate arbitrarily in their search for education: they seek services that welcome them on their own terms. Many existing adult education establishments might well see how they can expand their services and build in an advisory, and possibly counselling, service; they are uniquely placed as starting points of enquiry and experience; their programmes should be enlarged to encourage and foster this.

FUNCTION

- 12 The functions of a Local Learning Centre should be:
- (a) to help adults identify their educational needs and to enable them to plan suitable programmes to meet those needs;
 - (b) to provide vocational and general adult educational opportunities on a rolling programme basis throughout the calendar year rather than the more limited academic year. Centres should have a flexible, varying and varied approach to programme provision, offering classes and study opportunities that begin at weekly, fortnightly or monthly intervals instead of following the conventional academic term;
 - (c) to provide a base for adult basic education services;
 - (d) to operate a co-operative network and outreach function linked to the local community and enabling residents to identify and satisfy their educational needs;
 - (e) to connect with the wider local adult education service that uses local schools, institutes or colleges;
 - (f) to connect with the rich variety of clubs, societies and voluntary social groups that make up an active local community and, where gaps are identified, to make resources available (singly or in partnership) to those who wish to establish groups having an educational function;
 - (g) to connect with appropriate workplace learning schemes and those offered through MSC funded projects.

CURRICULUM

- 13 The curriculum in the Local Learning Centre will vary in breadth and content according to the position of the Centre in the education service. The Centre should have links with family advisory services and offer appropriate educational programmes in such matters as consumer protection, citizen's rights, health and welfare, social benefits and family planning.

- 14 A variety of language needs should be met: speech, written achievement, literary study, possibly drama and related movement, the formal study of literature, creative writing and related examinations. The Centre should have particular regard to the ethnic minority needs in its neighbourhood and seek to provide, or to have access to and links with, appropriate programmes providing tuition in, for example, English as a second language. Numeracy functions should range from basic arithmetic and elementary mathematics at one end of the scale to computer understanding and practical application at the other.
- 15 The curriculum should have regard to family matters like home management, savings, rent, rates, mortgages and the use of money, social rights, the care of children, cooking, and even plumbing and DIY.

Which of these curriculum aspects are offered directly, and which in collaboration with other local agencies is a matter for careful analysis and co-ordination by providing bodies. Centres are not intended to be the sole diagnostic service in a district; they should be seen as places of prime or initial contact. The aim is to create a comprehensive network of provision with different points of access. Each Centre should be an entry point into the network with provision either in the Centre or in another Centre in the network.

MANAGEMENT

- 16 The principles of management should allow forms of partnership between students and staff; between statutory and voluntary organisations as necessary; between the Centre and local organisations that provide other sorts of educational opportunity. The exact composition of management will vary but two possibilities that follow these principles are:
- (a) a Board of Management representative of major interests in the Centre with substantial membership of students, responsible to an Educational Trust funded by an LEA, or other statutory body (for example, the Area Health Authority), local commercial interests and public subscriptions and charges;
 - (b) a consortium of local or district branches of national voluntary agencies in collaboration with local authorities in a partnership to establish a local Centre.

STAFFING

- 17 Emphasis in the Centre should be on learning rather than teaching and therefore high calibre, well-educated (not always conventionally so) and imaginative

staff of two sorts will be needed:

- (a) those who will make up the small core of long-stay permanent enablers, tutorial and counselling staff;
- (b) a larger group of short-stay contracted staff some of whom may be drawn from industry or commerce and seconded for the purpose; some from administration and some from conventional teaching.

Special induction and orientation courses will be essential for these staff to introduce them to methods for educating adults. Some of them should be employed upon outreach and advisory work. Appropriate contracts acknowledging the continuous nature of working in Centres (morning, afternoon, evening, weekend and conventional holiday periods) will be important. Staff prepared to meet these criteria will have to be sought.

FUNDING

- 18 The necessary funding to establish Centres and a network of such Centres is not examined in detail in *Continuing Education: from policies to practice*; and, since it would take in so many elements, it is beyond the scope of this preliminary paper. Funding will however be necessary from central and local government and voluntary agencies to provide and run Local Learning Centres. The proposed pilot schemes (see paragraph 19) could examine this aspect in detail. They would enable a study of existing resources and their redeployment to be undertaken and take account of the breakdown in many areas of the inter-authority recoupment system which has become an obstacle to the effective development of a comprehensive continuing education service for adults.

PILOT SCHEMES

- 19 The Council believes that DES funds should be made available for the setting up of one or more pilot schemes. These would take into account the diversity of existing agencies, information and service resources, and the varying demographic nature of the society to be served. The principles of the schemes should be those outlined in this paper, supported by the substance of the Council's report *Continuing Education: from policies to practice* and by the data in the Council's survey of provision of *Post Initial Education in the North West of England*.
- 20 Such pilot schemes should be a charge upon any successor body to the Council and function under an appropriate steering committee which would include significant representation from voluntary organisations, from organisations which are representative of student interests, and take account of the student counselling experience of, for example, the Open University or one of the established advisory and counselling services.

PUBLICITY

- 21 The existence and function of Local Learning Centres and the network of such Centres needs to be made widely known; and this will require adequate publicity, particularly at the start of an academic year, calendar year or academic term. Libraries, the press, radio and television (local and national) all have a role to play. The Council's report on *Adults: their educational experience and needs* provides some useful information in this regard.

CONCLUSION

- 22 Local Learning Centres for continuing education differ from many of the existing establishments largely in that they begin where the adults are; they take learning to the market place of living and in their function are designed to relate to the adult world of business, trade, industry, commerce, agriculture, leisure and recreative opportunity rather than that of the school.
- 23 Local Learning Centres should provide the initial point of access for adults to a complex, diverse and extensive national system that includes the universities, the local and regional colleges, the polytechnics, the adult education establishments, the national voluntary organisations and the industrial and commercial training systems.
- 24 What is needed is a shift of position from the present structure of adult education establishments of all kinds to a comprehensive system which is flexible, locally based and student centred. Present institutions have an important role to play in such a system of continuing education and some will undoubtedly adapt to this new perspective. But existing provision needs to be rationalised; duplication of resources needs to be avoided; and present constraints need to be overcome so as to move towards a universality of service for adults so urgently needed.
-

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